

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for fusing two adjacent bones or pieces of bone, the method comprising:

positioning an adjustable fusion implant between two adjacent bones or pieces of bone;

expanding a portion of a tool inserted within the fusion implant so as to expand the fusion implant between the bones or pieces of bone; and

removing the tool from within the expanded fusion implant.

2. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the act of positioning comprises placing the adjustable fusion implant between two adjacent vertebrae.

3. A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising removably securing a distal end of an inserter to the fusion implant prior to the act of positioning.

4. A method as recited in claim 3, further comprising:

sliding a reinforcing member along the inserter so that the reinforcing member couples with the expanded fusion implant; and

disconnecting the inserter from the fusion implant.

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5. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the fusion implant has a first plate and an opposing second plate with a compartment formed therebetween, the method further comprising inserting a reinforcing member between the first plate and the second plate after the tool has been removed from the fusion implant.

6. A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising inserting the portion of the tool within the fusion implant prior to the act of positioning the adjustable fusion implant.

7. A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising at least partially packing the fusion implant with an osteogenic substance after the fusion implant is expanded.

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8. A method for fusing two adjacent bones or pieces of bone, the method comprising:

positioning an adjustable fusion implant between two adjacent bones or pieces of bone, the fusion implant comprising a first plate and an opposing second plate;

expanding a portion of a tool inserted between the first plate and the second plate of the fusion implant so as to expand the fusion implant between the bones or pieces of bone; and

removing the tool from the expanded fusion implant.

9. A method as recited in claim 8, wherein the act of positioning comprises placing the adjustable fusion implant between two adjacent vertebrae.

10. A method as recited in claim 8, further comprising removably securing a distal end of an inserter to the fusion implant prior to the act of positioning.

11. A method as recited in claim 10, further comprising:

sliding a reinforcing member along the inserter so that the reinforcing member couples with the expanded fusion implant; and

disconnecting the inserter from the fusion implant.

12. A method as recited in claim 8, further comprising inserting a reinforcing member between the first plate and the second plate after the tool has been removed from the fusion implant.

13. A method as recited in claim 8, further comprising inserting the portion of the tool within the fusion implant prior to the act of positioning the adjustable fusion implant.

14. A method as recited in claim 8, further comprising at least partially packing the fusion implant with an osteogenic substance after the fusion implant is expanded.

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15. A method for fusing two vertebrae, the method comprising:

forming a posterior opening through a back of a person so as to expose two vertebrae, the two vertebrae having a wedged shape gap formed therebetween that enlarges anteriorly toward a front of the person;

inserting an adjustable fusion implant through the posterior opening and into the gap formed between the vertebrae, the fusion implant having a wedge shaped configuration that enlarges from a proximal end to a distal end, the distal end of the fusion implant being inserted first into the gap formed between the vertebrae; and

expanding the fusion implant disposed between vertebrae such that the fusion implant maintains a wedge shaped configuration.

16. A method as recited in claim 15, wherein the act of expanding comprises:

expanding at least a portion of a tool within the fusion implant so as to selectively expand the fusion implant; and

removing the tool from within the fusion implant.

17. A method as recited in claim 16, further comprising inserting the portion of the tool within the fusion implant prior to the act of inserting the adjustable fusion implant.

18. A method as recited in claim 15, wherein the fusion implant has a first plate and an opposing second plate with a compartment formed therebetween, the method further comprising inserting a reinforcing member between the first plate and the second plate after the fusion implant has been expanded.

19. A method as recited in claim 18, wherein the reinforcing member is inserted within the compartment of the fusion implant.

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20. A method for fusing two adjacent bones or pieces of bone, the method comprising:

inserting an adjustable housing between two adjacent bones or pieces of bone, the housing at least partially bounding a compartment;

expanding the housing between the bones or pieces of bone; and

sliding a reinforcing member of a predetermined shape into at least a portion of the compartment of the housing after expansion of the housing.

21. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein the act of expanding comprises:

expanding at least a portion of a tool within the housing so as to selectively expand the housing; and

removing the tool from within the housing.

22. A method as recited in claim 20, further comprising removably securing a distal end of an inserter to the housing such that at least a portion of the inserter is disposed within the compartment of the housing, the inserter being secured prior to the act of inserting.

23. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein the act of sliding the reinforcing member comprises:

advancing a tubular push rod over a proximal end of the inserter; and

moving the push rod along the inserter so that the push rod advances the reinforcing member into at least a portion of the compartment.

24. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein the act of sliding the reinforcing member comprises:

removably connecting a distal end of a tubular push rod to the reinforcing member;

advancing the reinforcing member and tubular push rod over a proximal end of the inserter; and

moving the push rod along the inserter so that the push rod advances the reinforcing member into at least a portion of the compartment.

25. A method as recited in claim 24, further comprising:

removing the inserter from within the push rod; and

delivering bone graft through the tubular push rod and into the compartment.

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